

Minutes (approved 7/7/08)
Meeting of the County Council and the Howard County Board of Education
June 17, 2008

The meeting was called to order by Board of Education Chairman Frank Aquino at 8:15 a.m. on June 17, 2008 in the Board Room B, Board of Education Building.

Council members present: Calvin Ball, Mary Kay Sigaty, Jen Terrasa, and Courtney Watson.

Board of Education members present: Diane Mikulis, Frank Aquino, Larry Cohen, Sandra French, Ellen Flynn Giles, Patricia Gordon, Janet Siddiqui

Feasibility Study: Joel Gallihue, Manager, School Planning, summarized the recently released feasibility study. The study looked at school capacity, projected enrollment, the need for redistricting, and the need for facility planning. He said that the Board would need to redistrict schools in 2010. The report models three scenarios for managing enrollment and predicts the effect on various factors associated with each model.

There was some discussion about the effect of the timing of redistricting on the development community, as schools that are projected to be closed for enrollment, even if a subsequent redistricting will change the status, trigger the closing of the area for development. There was particular discussion about the Elkridge area, the effect of pending legislation (CB 39-2008) on enrollment, and the implications for school crowding, construction, and redistricting.

Nurse to School Ratio: Donna Heller, Coordinator of Health Services, reported that the nurse to student ratio currently is 1:1400, and the nurse to school ratio is 1:2 or 1:3. In the FY 09 budget, an allowance was made to bring the nurse to student ratio to 1:1100 and the nurse to school ratio to 1:2. In addition, Howard County schools all have a health assistant, who is a certified nursing assistant or a certified medical technician. At Dr. Ball's request, she explained the difference between Howard County's ratio and use of nurses and that of some neighboring counties.

Howard County involves nursing staff as part of the instructional team, incorporating health education and observation into the overall educational assessment and planning for students. The Howard County public schools are viewed by the State Department of Education as a model for their health services.

County Health Department—School Relationship: Asked about the relationship of the Howard County Schools' nursing staff to the County Health Department, Ms. Heller explained a number of initiatives in which the two agencies have cooperated. Dr. Cousin advised, however, that the school system would strongly oppose the Health Department's taking over the school nursing program.

Sustainable Funding for Capital Projects and the Gilbert Study: Ken Roey, Executive Director, Facilities Planning and Management, reported that the Gilbert Study documented the need for ongoing maintenance in the schools. The problem is identifying a source of income.

A discussion followed concerning expected limitations in State funding, the fact that the revenues from the excise tax already have been pledged to pay debt, and stresses on the County's budget. Mr. Roey and Superintendent Sydney Cousin said that a sustainable source of funding is necessary. Dr. Cousin opined that the County could be less conservative about the level of bonded indebtedness it authorizes annually, although Frank Aquino, who sits on the Spending Affordability Committee, said that it would be a hard sell to increase debt, as the Committee is mindful of economic uncertainties that may affect the County's ability to pay the debt.

Ms. Watson asked for the following additions to information provided: 1) the amount of capital funding requested by the Board in each year on the chart distributed; and 2) a projection of funding and needs for the next four years.

It was agreed that the State delegation and the County Executive need to be part of any discussion of finding new revenue sources. Other counties, it was reported, are coping with the same problems by deferring projects. Ms. Sigaty reminded the members of the backlog of competing county projects, including roads, and the possibility that shortchanging those projects to provide more fully for school needs may in time strain the goodwill of taxpayers who do not have children in school. All agreed that there needs to be a careful balance among the needs and the use of resources.

Renovation Guidelines: Mr. Roey reported on a project underway to try to rationalize the different approaches to renovations by the Facilities Office and the School Construction office. The goal is to present renovation guidelines that will work for both.

Gilbert Study: Ms. Sigaty noted her interest in the charts in the Gilbert Study showing the relationship of each school to the educational specifications. While uniformity in relation to the specifications is not a goal, particularly as it relates to renovation, the school system hopes that the renovation guidelines will serve as the appropriate standard for renovation projects.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m.